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SUBJECT Admiral Stansfield Turner Interviewed

DAN RATHER: Seldom, if ever, is a reporter let into the world of spies and counterspies, intelligence and counter-intelligence, a country's most closely guarded secrets. But last week the man who ran the CIA for the last four years agreed to share some of his world with us. A career naval officer, Admiral Stansfield Turner was plucked from obscurity by a fellow classmate of his at Annapolis, a man named Jimmy Carter. At times he must have wished he were back at sea. For under Turner's regime the CIA came under vigorous attack, particularly for allegedly failing to accurately assess the developing situation in Iran.

We talked to Admiral Turner at his home in Virginia.

Now does Iran stand as an intelligence failure? Not just during your tour at the Central Intelligence Agency, but for American intelligence as a whole, does it represent a failure?

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: I don't really think so. I think that's an oversimplification of the issue. And I'm not trying to be defensive here. I think that intelligence in this country, over a long period of time, generally kept the policymakers aware that there were problems developing in Iran. When you come to predicting an actual revolution or coup that's another thing and it's much more difficult, much more problematic.

But the real, fundamental issue is were we telling the policymakers that there were difficult situations in Iran that were going to cause trouble in the future? And I think we generally were.

RATHER: But the House Intelligence Committee disagrees with Admiral Turner. It published a report in January 1979 accu-

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sing the CIA of failing entirely to note the gravity of recent popular disturbances in Iran. Said the committee, "The CIA published two studies one in August 1977 and another a year later, that said the Shah will be an active participant in Iranian life well into the 1980s, and that Iran is not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation."

ADMIRAL TURNER: The report you're talking about is not a CIA report. I've had that quoted to me before. That was a draft which never saw the light of day, and it is not the CIA position that you've quoted.

RATHER: It was not the CIA position at that time.

ADMIRAL TURNER: It was not the CIA position.

RATHER: Well let's set the record straight about that. You know the source of that. It's a congressional source which describes it as a CIA report. And what you're saying it's a draft -- it was a draft and not a report.

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's correct. And I personally rejected that draft, and so I know it is not true.

RATHER: Well, during that time, what was -- in general what was the CIA telling American policymakers?

ADMIRAL TURNER: We were telling them that there were all kinds of opposition to the Shah, some on cultural, some on religious, some on economic, some on political grounds.

What we did not predict was that all of these forms of opposition would coalesce under the aegis of a 78-year-old cleric who had been an expatriate for 16 years and would become more than the Shah could handle, when he had large military and police powers to back him up. In short, we thought that when the crunch came and these dissident groups rose to greater power, the Shah would step in at the right time and knock it down. He didn't.

Dan, I still don't know why. I suspect it may have had something to do with his illness.

RATHER: One of the most important questions to me about Iran -- and it's one that you would know about -- is, was the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran something done by local militants and students, or was it something planned and done on a larger scale? Were outside terrorists involved?

ADMIRAL TURNER: My best estimate at this point -- and we have a few fragments from the hostages who have just returned -- is that it really was an Islamic student movement. Clearly, any movement like that gets infiltrated over a period of time, to some

extent. I don't believe it ever got infiltrated to the point it was controlled by outside terrorist-type people.

RATHER: The best available information indicates what, if any complicity by an international conspiracy?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Very little, or none. I don't have any indication of that.

RATHER: You have no indication of that.

ADMIRAL TURNER: No.

RATHER: That would include the PLO?

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's correct.

RATHER: And the Soviets?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Now, that does not mean that there weren't students in there who had been trained by the PLO, had been to PLO camps, and one thing, in the course of their life. But as far as directing and having a major influence on that, we don't believe the Soviets or the PLO did?

RATHER: The new Secretary of State, General Alexander Haig whom I believe you know reasonably well, said at his first news conference that the Soviet Union is fostering and supporting an expanding international terrorism throughout the world.

ADMIRAL TURNER: When the Soviets are willing to supply arms to a country like Libya, which is obviously causing problems in terrorism and many other ways all around the world -- it's a real troublemaker -- you have to associate the Soviet Union with that type of activity. They are in complicity with the Libyans.

I think he's right that the Soviets have encouraged revolutionary movements in many countries that have ended up with some form of terrorism the PLO and others. But I'd rather let him buttress his own argument.

RATHER: Is this a fact based on hard intelligence, what you consider to be hard intelligence, that the Soviets have helped to sponsor the Palestine Liberation Organization?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think there's reasonable intelligence that there have been lots of contacts between the two. And there's certainly hard intelligence on the strong Libyan connection with the Soviets.

RATHER: Now how much about that -- how much of that can you tell me? I mean what is the connection between the Soviets and the Libyans, and Libyan sponsorship of terrorism?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, the connection between the Soviets and the Libyans is in the supply, or the sale of excessive amounts of military equipment, far beyond what the Libyans can possibly use on their own. And therefore the Soviets must certainly realize that the Libyans are going to put this to nefarious employment.

RATHER: Where has most of their activity been centered? In Africa itself?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well no. It's worldwide. Not just terrorism, but their interference. They're causing problems in Central America. They're funding the Muslim liberation groups in the Philippines. They're all over the world, causing difficulties.

RATHER: It comes as news to me that the Libyans are involved in any way in Central America.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, the critical thing going on in Central America today is the internationalization of revolution down there, the outside support that is coming to all these revolutionary movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador and Guatemala, and so on. And I think this is a very dangerous trend for the United States, and one that's right on our back doorstep.

RATHER: Well, again how much can you tell me about that? You say the internationalization. How does that manifest itself?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think you certainly recognize that it's the Cuban hand in funneling much of this equipment to the revolutionaries that has been much of the cause of the problem. Now, the Cubans don't have the resources to provide much of anything to anybody. Their economy is in very bad condition. They're getting that from the Libyans, from the Soviets, from others.

RATHER: From an intelligence-community standpoint, does the future look as dark in Central America as it does to many of us outside the intelligence community?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes, I think it does. I think it's a very serious prospect for the United States.

RATHER: What is that prospect?

ADMIRAL TURNER: The prospect is foreign-, Cuban or Soviet, dominated regimes in some of those Central American countries. And the danger that poses to our friends, the Mexicans to the north, let alone to South America to the south.

RATHER: During his term in office, Admiral Turner came

under and avalanche of criticism, not only from Congress, which insisting on controlling espionage activities, but from agency insiders demoralized by what they regarded as arbitrary dismissals of key personnel. Said one CIA veteran, Cord Meyer, "By the summer of 1980, a clear consensus had emerged in Washington that Turner should be replaced."

You know that you've been criticized for presiding over the demoralization of the Central Intelligence Agency. Let me put that in quotation marks. That you dismissed a few hundred employees. One CIA chief overseas was recently quoted in print as saying, quote, Turner has gutted the agency and created a disastrous morale problem." Unquote.

How do you respond to that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: The morale was very serious when I got there because of all the public criticism. The agency was in a state of shell shock. The reductions I made were on the recommendation of the agency. They weren't my idea. In fact, I cut the recommendation by a third and reduced the number who were to be dismissed. And it in no way gutted the agency. In fact, only 17 people were actually asked to leave.

Morale today is very good at the Central Intelligence Agency. I think we had to take it, as I said earlier, through a period of shock and change, adaptation to the new environment of intelligence. And we have done that. The foundation is there for the future today. It's on a good solid course, and it's a happy organization.